

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

December 8, 2005

SAN MATEO COUNTY COASTAL FISH BARRIER REMOVAL

Project No.: 05-094

Project Manager: Marina Cazorla

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy amend its August 14, 2003 authorization and disburse to Sustainable Conservation up to \$120,000 to construct a well as a component of a fish barrier removal project in San Mateo County's Memorial County Park (part of the Pescadero Park complex) at Pescadero Creek, and up to \$20,000 to prioritize other San Mateo County fish barrier removal projects for possible implementation.

LOCATION: Pescadero Park and greater San Mateo County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project location and site map

Exhibit 2: Pescadero watershed map

Exhibit 3: August 2003 Staff Recommendation for original grant to Sustainable Conservation

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-270 of the Public Resources Code:

"The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the amendment of its August 14, 2003 authorization to disburse to Sustainable Conservation an amount not to exceed one hundred twenty thousand dollars (\$120,000) to construct a well as a component of a fish barrier removal project in San Mateo County's Memorial County Park (part of the Pescadero Park complex) at Pescadero Creek, and an amount not to exceed twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) to prioritize other San Mateo County fish barrier removal projects for possible implementation, subject to the following condition:

Prior to the disbursement of funds, Sustainable Conservation shall submit in writing for the review and approval of the Conservancy's Executive Officer:

- a. A final work program, schedule and budget; signing program acknowledging assistance from the Conservancy; and any contractors to be employed in implementation of both components of the project.
- b. Evidence that all necessary permits and approvals have been obtained for the construction of the well. ”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 6 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-270) regarding the enhancement of coastal resources.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The proposed project remains consistent with the findings made in the Conservancy’s August 14, 2003 authorization with respect to nonprofit status for Sustainable Conservation.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Sustainable Conservation would carry out the two following projects in San Mateo County: the Memorial County Park well project (a component of a larger fish barrier removal project), and a San Mateo County fish barrier removal prioritization assessment.

Memorial County Park/Pescadero Creek Well Project

For the proposed project, Sustainable Conservation would construct a potable water well in San Mateo County’s Memorial County Park (part of the County’s Pescadero Park complex), which would enable San Mateo County Parks to undertake planned and funded fish barrier removal projects in Pescadero Creek. The County would remove barriers at the confluence of Peterson Creek on the west and the confluence of McCormick Creek on the east. The new well will be located upland near Wurr Road. The proposed project would replace the existing in-stream water diversion that currently supplies water to thousands of Memorial County Park visitors and park users year-round.

The barrier removal projects will enhance and restore threatened steelhead and endangered coho habitat in the middle reaches of Pescadero Creek by improving sediment transport and removing the remaining migration obstacles within Memorial County Park. The removal of the flashboard dam structure as described in the barrier removal project cannot proceed until the well is developed to replace the existing pipeline water diversion. The barrier removal project has received \$279,885 in funding from a California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) grant. Additionally, the San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation provided a grant of \$100,000 for a feasibility study and design documents necessary to apply for the DFG grant. San

Mateo County Parks and Recreation Division planning staff and rangers have committed significant time to this project.

Objectives of the barrier removal project are removal of the flashboard dam structure used for in-stream water diversion and modification of the Sequoia Flat crossing, while also maintaining a water source and access for the existing, popular public campground. The project would complement previous projects designed to improve fish habitat, including removal of three dam structures, road and trail repairs to reduce erosion, and bathroom upgrades to conserve water. The project will result in the removal or modification of all human built structures in the creek that were identified by DFG staff as a priority for removal. Expected results from this project include a healthier sediment transport regime, opening of additional spawning gravels, fostering additional rearing habitat, and removal of barriers affecting both juvenile and adult migration.

Removal of the dam structure and modification of the Sequoia Flat crossing in Memorial County Park will address factors limiting juvenile and adult salmonids migration. Currently, the structures prevent summer movement of juveniles up and downstream. Additionally, the dam, under certain conditions, impedes upstream movement of spawning adults. It creates flow scenarios that exceed maximum average surface water velocity and maximum hydraulic drop criteria for both adult and juvenile salmonid. Surface water velocity through the chute feature of the dam average 7 feet per second and the hydraulic gradient over the top of the dam can be over 12 inches (Balance Hydrologics, Inc. 2003). Removal of dam structure and modification of the Sequoia Flat crossing will also facilitate the natural development of rearing habitat upstream and downstream of the existing structures. Presently, bed materials in the vicinity of the structures are dominated by fines. Removal will help restore spawning riffles and complex pools, including woody debris, and moderate water temperatures along this reach of creek. Removal of the dam structure will allow for the downstream mobility of spawning gravels. An initial assessment of the bed material in Pescadero Creek at Memorial County Park reveals that sediment upstream of the dam is better suited for spawning and rearing of salmonids than sediment downstream of the dam.

Pescadero Creek historically supported both coho and steelhead. While there was little evidence of coho during the 1990's, steelhead populations remained. For the past two years, the National Marine Fisheries Service has been stocking Pescadero Creek with coho and steelhead smolts and fry from the adjacent Scott Creek hatchery. The fish were released downstream of the flashboard dam and with this project will benefit from the additional rearing and spawning habitat that will be accessible upstream after the fish barriers and the dam are removed.

Site Description

The proposed project is located within Memorial County Park (part of the Pescadero Park complex) in San Mateo County on Pescadero Creek, a tributary to the Pacific Ocean. This project will change the point of the existing diversion of water, which provides water to Memorial Park year round. Memorial Park is one of San Mateo County's premier camping parks and contains old growth redwoods. The Park was used by approximately 129,622 people in 2004, including families from outside of San Mateo County and many youth groups. The Pescadero Creek watershed encompasses 40.5 square miles and the watershed area included

in this proposal is 0.8 square miles (499 acres). The watershed length of blue line streams is 94.9 miles with approximately 1 mile directly affected by this project. Approximately 62.3 miles of Pescadero Creek and its tributaries will be further opened for spawning access by the proposed project. Memorial County Park's General Plan designation is General Open Space, and the park is zoned as Resource Management. Memorial County Park is located outside the Coastal Zone.

Project History:

The proposed project would use previously authorized funds from an August 2003 Conservancy Board approval for a San Mateo County ponds project with Sustainable Conservation. The following project history explains why remaining funds cannot be expended on the originally authorized project.

In May 2002, the Conservancy was one of several sponsors of the San Mateo County Land Stewardship Conference, an event that brought together landowners, farmers, land trusts, local and state elected officials, regulatory agency staff, nonprofit groups, local and state resource agencies, and concerned citizens, to discuss the many challenges to effective land stewardship. Out of this event, consensus was reached on the need to develop a strategy to balance limited water supplies on the coast to serve the needs of the agricultural community while meeting the regulatory requirements to benefit protected fish species. Beginning in fall 2002, the Bay Area Open Space Council convened a series of meetings and assembled a technical advisory committee to determine if off-stream storage of winter flows for agricultural irrigation was feasible.

In June 2003, Conservancy staff met with Resources Agency and California Department of Fish and Game staff and it was agreed that such an approach was innovative, necessary and feasible. Promoted by the San Mateo Farm Bureau and funded by the Conservancy, the ponds project was envisioned as a way to avoid future regulatory conflicts by voluntarily restoring dry season stream flows and securing irrigation water in compliance with new regulatory mandates. However, the ponds project stalled due to regulatory issues, and the remaining project funds cannot be expended on the original project before the funds expire. However, the redirection of the funds to San Mateo County's Memorial Park well water diversion project will enable San Mateo County to complete fish barrier removal projects on Pescadero Creek and prioritize future fish barrier removal projects for implementation.

Fish Barrier Removal Prioritization

Although there have been a number of published efforts to identify and prioritize barriers to fish passage that include San Mateo County streams, these efforts have focused mainly on public lands and road crossings. Barriers on private lands have been less well documented due to privacy considerations.

Sustainable Conservation's goal for the San Mateo Fish Passage Barrier Removal - Prioritization for Implementation Project (PIP) is to complete the following tasks: identify biologically important barriers to anadromous fish passage on both public and private lands in San Mateo County, assess the benefits and costs associated with removal of these barriers, and assign a priority ranking based on the feasibility of removing barriers in relation to expected fisheries

benefits. In short, Sustainable Conservation will complete a report that includes a “bang for the buck” priority list to focus future barrier removal efforts in coastal San Mateo County. Specifically, the project proposes to develop a recommendation of the 10 highest priority barriers to anadromous fish passage in coastal San Mateo County based on:

- Importance to anadromous fisheries resources
- Site access and engineering complexity
- Extent of expected resource protection requirements
- Permitting feasibility/complexity
- Landowner participation

This effort will help ensure that barrier removal resources are allocated efficiently and that all relevant factors have been considered before barrier removal funds are committed to individual projects. Sustainable Conservation has extensive experience in facilitating stream restoration projects and helping land owners be good stewards of the environment.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Fish Barrier Removal Prioritization

Coastal Conservancy	<u>\$ 20,000</u>
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Pescadero Creek Project

Well Construction

Coastal Conservancy	\$120,000
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Fish Barrier Removal Implementation

County of San Mateo	\$100,000
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CA Department of Fish & Game	<u>\$279,885</u>
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Total Project Cost	<u>\$499,885</u>
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The source of the Coastal Conservancy funds would be previously authorized Salmonid Recovery Program Funds, FY 2001/02 budget appropriation from Proposition 12. These funds may be used for projects that benefit salmonids. The subjects proposed are consistent with this purpose.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

These projects would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of the Conservancy's legislation (California Public Resources Code, Sections 31251-31270). Consistent with Section 31251, the project would enhance the fish and riparian habitat potential of Pescadero Creek by installing a well water diversion that will allow important fish barrier removal projects to proceed. Consistent with Section 31252, the proposed project would be consistent with policies contained in the San Mateo County Land Use Plan, although the project location is not in the Coastal Zone and therefore is not subject to LCP requirements. Under Section 31253, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of any coastal resource enhancement project. Consistent with Section 31253, the level of Conservancy funding recommended for this project has been determined

through consideration of the total amount of funding available for coastal resource enhancement projects and the relative urgency of the project.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective A**, the proposed project would preserve and restore a coastal watershed (Pescadero-Butano) by enabling multiple fish barriers to be removed on Pescadero Creek.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See "Project Financing" above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by San Mateo County Parks and Recreation.
4. **Location:** The proposed projects would be located within San Mateo County.
5. **Need:** Unless this well water diversion project is funded, San Mateo County will not be able to complete other valuable fish barrier removal projects at Pescadero Creek, and would lose funding that was already obtained for the projects. Prioritization of remaining fish barriers for implementation would ensure the efficient allocation of limited restoration funds.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The biological resources in Pescadero Creek, particularly the existing steelhead population and the historic coho population, are of statewide significance.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** The continued existence of barriers to upstream fish migration presents a threat to the long-term viability of the steelhead fishery in Pescadero Creek. The proposed project would provide a permanent, greatly improved solution to fish passage problems in Pescadero Creek. The County is at risk of losing its DFG grant if it does not secure funds to construct the well prior to next spring.
8. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
9. **Readiness:** The County of San Mateo has completed the project designs and environmental review and is in the final stages of obtaining the permits and approvals necessary to complete the proposed project. Sustainable Conservation is prepared to undertake the fish barrier prioritization for implementation assessment immediately.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The Memorial County Park and Pescadero Creek well project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15302(c), in that this action consists of replacement or reconstruction of existing utility systems involving no expansion of capacity. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the proposed project upon approval.

Development of a prioritization of fish barrier removal projects is categorically exempt from CEQA under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306, in that these actions consist of planning studies and feasibility analyses, data collection, research, and resource-evaluation activities. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.